

## FAITS MALACCOMPLIS AND THE ORIGINS OF CRISIS

A number of apparently dissimilar international crises share a common origin: the somewhat unsuccessful attempt by the heads of one state to confront an opponent or an ally with a fait accompli. *on a part of his own constitution*

From this tactic, and its failure, a remarkable number of standard consequences flow with relatively high probability, so that these particular crises (which tend rarely to be examined together because of their obvious disparities in other respects) show a rich collection of similarities when compared in detail. Moreover, these common features, examined together for a particular crisis, show an inner coherence, a logic, that betrays causal relationships; there seems a basis for a theory of this sub-class of crises. Yet these relationships seem ill-understood by the expert practitioners in the various governments; for these incidents are generally accompanied by shocking surprises, on both sides, at the time, and by persistent puzzlement afterwards. Thus this sub-class is a particularly enticing subject for analysis.

The tactical goal of producing a fait accompli--of catching a well-informed and powerful state unready to respond quickly and effectively, by surprising it--imposes severe tactical requirements, so that the "moves" and circumstances leading up to the overt crises in this class almost inevitably show many similarities. What is less recognized--either by observers or by participants, *on either side*, either at the time or later--is the causal impact of many of these features upon the later course of events.

WHY FAITS ACCOMPLIS? and HOW TO ACHIEVE THEM

An action against the interests (or preference or desire or policy) of another party may have some more-or-less well-defined interval of vulnerability, during which it can be opposed or counteracted with relative ease and effectiveness. The problem is to prevent response by the opposed party during this vulnerable period so that opposition, if finally contemplated, must deal in alternatives that are relatively ineffective, costly or risky.

The key to the problem is that: (a) states (like all big organizations) take a significantly long time to respond to a perceived threat or change in the environment, and (b) the length of this time depends on many factors of readiness, which depends on (c) the prior expectations of decision-makers, which can (d) be manipulated by opposing actions and declarations and the manner in which the action is prepared and carried out.

One way to understand the operational goals of a fait accompli is to conceive it as aimed at producing a change in the status quo, against the interests of an opposing state, without creating a "crisis" for the leaders of that opposing state. In this context, we may think of a "crisis" as an urgent search by policymakers for means to influence or prevent this change; an energetic search presupposes some hope of success in finding a solution. It presumes a situation that is seen as a challenge. The fait accompli is intended to abort this search, by confronting the opposing decisionmakers, not with a challenge, but with a hopeless situation, one in which their interests are damaged but which they are powerless to restore to the old status



quo or which they can oppose only with measures that seem obviously too risky, too costly, or too ineffective to be worth considering.

Success in the fait accompli consists in convincing the opposing leaders--despite their surprise, shock, and their consciousness of a reverse--<sup>that it is "too late" for them to do anything effective to avert the reverse.</sup> and to convince them of this immediately or very quickly, before the urgent and serious search for effective action that constitutes a crisis fully develops. Indeed, if the leaders are led to this conclusion, they can be expected to try to reduce the domestic political consequences of the national reverse for themselves, by deprecating the significance of the defeat or even by interpreting it as a desirable change.

#### <sup>R</sup> FAILURE, AS CRISIS

This goal still does not account for the dominant tactics of the fait accompli: speed, secrecy, and deception. These three characteristics aim at producing a surprise for the opponent, and this in turn is related to the need, in the preceding period, to reduce his readiness to respond effectively in time.

Now, it is not always useful to postpone an opponent's response to one's action by misleading him and encouraging unreadiness. If it is, it must be because the situation that the opponent will confront at a later stage of one's operation will appear more discouraging to counter-action than it would have appeared at an earlier stage, or than it would if the opponent had been ready to act more promptly. This is not always the case. Though it may be hard to respond, it may be no harder to respond late than early; or, the change, appearing suddenly and unequivocally in an advanced state, may appear more threatening than if it had emerged gradually; or, the tactics of speed, secrecy and deception accompanying the move may in themselves be regarded as highly provocative. (This last possibility, which we shall discuss

at length, seems often to be underestimated by those contemplating a fait accompli.)

Circumstances in which it is useful to delay opposing action can usually be described in the following terms: there is a vulnerable stage in the sequence of preparations and moves leading to the change in the status quo, during which the opponent could block or deter or reverse the development relatively easily, cheaply, and risklessly, with means at his disposal, if he were aware of the development and could make his decisions and employ these means fast enough, within the vulnerable period. But if his awareness can be delayed, or his reactions slowed, or the period of vulnerability compressed relative to his reaction time, a state of affairs may arise in which the actions that would have been effective earlier would no longer promise decisive results, and there are in the new situation no alternative cheap, easy, or unriskey measures that look effective.

There is simply no point in going to the trouble of compressing to the utmost one's preparations for a move, of keeping them secret, or misleading an opponent into a state of unreadiness, unless these tactics are going to make it significantly harder for the opponent to respond, or less likely that he will respond violently or effectively. The circumstances that recommend<sup>d</sup> an attempt at a fait accompli must be such that the chances of an effective response seem to be lowered significantly by preventing any early response. This is a matter of judgment, and in the historic cases of faits accomplis to be considered, an observer of the attempts might disagree that they fitted these circumstances. Nevertheless, we can assume that the initiators of the attempts focused upon the high vulnerability of their actions in the

earlier phases and (perhaps mistakenly) deprecated, relatively, both their vulnerability in the later phases of the move and the provocation<sup>ve</sup>ness of the tactics. The following descriptions, then, represent guesses at the salient features of the moves as seen by the initiators.

In the classic case of the military fait accompli the move in question is a movement of troops across national frontiers to occupy territory. During the phase of preparations for this movement, it might be blocked by mobilization, redeployment, or a higher state of alert within the victim's territory (or, even at more risk, by a limited preemptive attack). It might be deterred by explicit warnings, threats, and commitments of violent retaliation; or by appeals to and commitments by third parties; or by arousing world public opinion or even opposing factions within the aggressor's country. All of these moves would be aimed at producing inhibiting counterpressures within the aggressor's alliances, public or (its) government.

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Likewise, during the actual movement of troops across the border, they may be vulnerable to flanking attacks that would disorganize them or cut them off, or to air attacks upon the advancing column or upon their supportin<sup>g</sup> elements and supply train. Moreover, if the defender is ready to respond promptly at all, he may have good terrain in which to exploit the advantages of the defense. If, however, in his unready state, the defender is not occupying this good defensive terrain at all, or is quickly pushed out of it, it may be the attacker who can move into and develop the high ground, the river line, or the coastal frontier.

As time goes on, and he moves troops and supplies, digs in

and develops the defenses, it is he who enjoys the advantages of defenses. ~~cases~~, it is he who enjoys the advantages of defense; not does he offer his opponent the opportunity to catch him unawares. Moreover, his surprise move may have achieved this situation relatively bloodlessly, minimizing the provocation of the move itself. It may be evident, however, that to force him out of the position attained, in his alerted and defensive position, would not only be costly for the attacker, but could be achieved only by inflicting great loss of life upon its forces, a challenge which would "force" him to respond strongly. He is, in short, "committed" to defending the "new status quo." As time goes on this degree of commitment (which was minimal in the earliest stages of the aggressive movement) increases still further, as does the "legitimacy," de facto, of the new status quo.

For the fait accompli to be attractive, the end result must be a situation in which even certainty of the state of affairs or of events to come--that is, even disclosure, the eventual loss of secrecy--is not enough to move the opponent to counteraction. (Before this final state were achieved, there might be distinguishable, intervening stages symbolized most simply by a three-phase pattern: Phase 1, in which even a moderately high expectation would lead to effective counteraction; Phase 2, in which near-certainty would be required but would be enough; and Phase 3, in which even certainty would not evoke action, the situation appearing hopeless.)

All of this discussion has focused on the possibility and the motives of decisive counteraction, but there are three other sorts

of responses to warning that the initiator of the fait accompli must prevent.

a. Alerts, increases in readiness, preparatory moves that lower the costs or risks or increase the effectiveness of later counter-moves that might be undertaken in response to further warning. In effect, such moves destroy the three-phase pattern by making it roughly as easy to block late moves in the sequence as early ones.

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b. Measures to improve warning; increases in collection, transmission or analysis of information. These make it more difficult for the initiator to preserve secrecy "long enough," that is, throughout Phase 1. (Abandoning secrecy risks <sup>working</sup> these measures; may ensure commitment, where secrecy encourages commitment especially if domestic opposition "isn't fooled").

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c. Commitments to counteraction that make it less easy for the opponent to avoid taking even costly or dangerous counteraction, given sufficiently unequivocal evidence of the move. One of the important crisis patterns to be analyzed--a pattern, as it happens, of miscalculation on both sides--is that the very secrecy and deception intended by the initiator of the fait accompli to prevent effective counter-moves, <sup>or</sup> increases in readiness, or increased reconnaissance and warning capability, have the undesired and unanticipated effect of encouraging commitments <sup>by the target nation</sup> that make eventual radical counteraction much more likely, or inevitable. Moreover, because the nature and impact of these commitments may not be well understood by foreign analysts, and the degree to which they actually tie the hands of national leaders may be heavily discounted or unnoticed abroad, the occurrence of these commitments may not serve as danger signals to the initiator of the

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fait accompli that his tactics are in trouble.

All of the above examples illustrate the three-phase pattern we have described abstractly. Of course, to divide complex sequences of events sharply into a small number of phases is artificial; yet, in these situations, the notion of abrupt and significant changes in state, discontinuous shifts in vulnerability, seems less artificial as an abstraction than the alternative notion of smooth variations. A boundary is crossed with uniformed troops; missiles arrive at a port, and then at sites; a position is occupied and a defensive perimeter established; an air defense system goes operational, with radars turned on, missiles armed and fueled, communications working, the system manned with experienced operators; none of these happenings are strictly points in time--they all have duration, with some vagueness and arbitrariness at their edges--yet they are all events that can be located relatively precisely on a time dimension, and they tend to make a sharp difference. After they happen, things are not the same.

To recapitulate: before events have reached one of these turning points, relatively cheap or riskless actions would be effective in deterring or blocking later stages of the move, whereas in what we shall call Phase 2 no such "easy" countermoves, including these, would be effective. Even in Phase 1, though the appropriate countermoves would be cheap, they would not be free, or totally without risk; they would not be undertaken unless necessary. Typically, they would not be undertaken unless there was some degree of expectation, some subjective probability in the minds of the leaders of the opposing state, that an unfavorable change in the status quo was being prepared. But even a fairly low probability of this might be enough to trigger

these early blocking, deterring, or alerting moves.

In the later phase, <sup>2</sup> if any effective countermoves are available at all, they are, by our assumption, so costly or risky that they would not be undertaken unless they were almost certainly needed; they are regarded as so serious--for instance, ultimatums, mobilization, shifts in alliances, drastic changes in basic policies, or major military attacks-- that a high false alarm rate could not be tolerated. This attitude will be reflected in a requirement for a high degree of probability that the unfavorable development is at hand before these actions will be undertaken. Revised

So far as deception is concerned, then, the problem for the initiator of the fait accompli is less stringent in Phase 2 than earlier; he need not prevent all suspicion as to his intention or actions, but merely prevent the opponent from attaining anything close to near-certainty.

Even this may eventually become difficult. In fact, the time will almost surely come when the opponent does "know for a fact" what is about to happen, or what has already occurred. If at this moment, not having acted sooner, the intended victim finds counteraction essential, and takes it, despite its cost and risks for both parties, then the only effect of the tactics of fait accompli have been to delay the confrontation and to contrive that it should take place on a higher level of violence. This represents a failure of the tactics, regardless of the eventual outcome. Likewise, as I have suggested earlier, the tactics have suffered a relative failure if the opponent even seriously considers such countermoves, in Phase 3, that is, if a decision-making "crisis" results in which these radical countermoves have a

significantly high probability of emerging. What is desired is the opponent's recognition that even radical and violent countermoves would be ineffective, or very excessively costly or risky, and for this conclusion should be reached so quickly and so confidently such moves get no real consideration.

*Nitze, Rusk*

It must be kept in mind that we are describing here not military operations aimed at the destruction or surrender of the opposing state, but aimed rather at the acceptance by the opposing state of a limited loss of its territorial integrity; although, on a larger scale, the same considerations might arise in the process of destroying the sovereign state when it is important to discourage intervention by allies or third parties.

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The pattern appears, in the small, in its classic form in

- (1) Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland, and on the larger scale, in his
- (2) carrying out of the Anschluss with Austria, (3) his occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia after the Munich agreement, and (4) his Blitzkrieg attacks upon Poland, Norway, the Lowlands, and France. (Although none of these, except the Rhineland, was limited with respect to the individual victim nation, a major consideration in each was to discourage its allies from carrying out their obligations and third parties from intervening.

Likewise, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor fitted the classic pattern of the limited military fait accompli. More recently, the North Korean attack in 1950; similarly, the attack of the Israelis into the Sinai Peninsula, and the simultaneous British and French operation along the Suez Canal in 1956, although the object in this case was not ultimately to hold territory or to exploit a defensive posi-



May 1961  
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tion. Finally, surprise and deception were used in the abortive invasion of the Bay of Pigs in 1961, to give heavily outmanned forces a chance to establish a beachhead long enough for hoped-for political developments (and, perhaps, to justify U.S. direct support).

The Soviet establishment of a large military base and missile sites in-Cuba in August to October, 1962, was not an aggressive military fait accompli in a classic sense, but it did present in classic form the three-phase characteristics that recommend the tactics of a fait accompli. Disclosures during the preparations for the move could have resulted in political, diplomatic, and economic countermeasures, and more significant, even more powerful domestic pressures upon the President to resist the move than were actually generated. The movement itself was vulnerable to interdiction by a blockade. Moreover, pressures could have been brought to bear on Cubans to change their mind about accepting the move.

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Although the Soviet commitment was considerably increased and the effectiveness of protest or blockade progressively reduced as Soviet personnel and equipment actually arrived in Cuba, the installation was still relatively vulnerable to air attack prior to the achievement of operational status by the SAM system or by individual missile sites. A second phase would distinctly have arrived, however, once the equipment, including IRBMs, war heads and fuel, had all arrived, the SAM system including its communications was fully operational, and at least some of the MRBMs were in an alert, operational status. No longer would a selected military blockade have had any significance whatever, nor would a limited "surgical" attack

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have eliminated the offensive capability. A limited attack could only serve as a demonstration; and against operational missiles, a significantly risky one. The remaining alternatives, other than mere protest or the offer of negotiations and trades, would have been a full blockade, a long process of questionable effectiveness and <sup>great controversy</sup> within our Alliances; an air attack upon a very large target system with high collateral damage and the risk of significant local or global counteraction; and/or an invasion. (As noted above, Soviet move itself could not be regarded as aggression, although this label was in fact used rather freely by the U.S. Government; on the contrary, the need for the tactics of a fait accompli was to prevent U.S. counteractions that could themselves be regarded as aggressive. However, there are interesting similarities to this case in the episodes of the Rhineland and the Anschluss. In each of these cases, the character of the military move as "aggression" was considerably ambiguous, a fact which definitely slowed the reactions of at least some third parties.)

At this point in the discussion we can see why it is that a near-success in a fait accompli, that is, a near miss, can be more dangerous for the initiator than a total failure. A total failure might consist of the opponent getting his wind up very early in the game, proceeding to block subsequent moves to increase his readiness or warning or commitments, all at a fairly low level of international tension. Alternatively, the initiator may have made a major miscalculation, overlooking a simple and effective countermove which the opponent employs without hesitation even late in the sequence.

A much more dangerous mistake is to have calculated correctly that the opponent, perceiving the threat late in the game, will find only violent

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risky countermoves worth considering, but to have "slightly" underestimated his willingness to use these moves. Another dangerous failure in a three-phase situation is for the secrecy of the operation to fail, alerting the opponent, not in Phase I where non-violent blocking measures would be adequate, but in Phase II, when near certainty is enough to move the opponent to the violent counteraction necessary (whereas Phase III would have been a safe harbor for the initiator, if the opponent could have been kept uncertain just a bit longer).

What makes attempts at a fait accompli highly relevant to a study of crises is the frequency with which intense crises are, in fact, caused by just these sorts of Phase II failures. And in a study of the fait accompli per se, the frequency with which these failures occur needs explanation, as does the fact that they come so frequently as surprises to the initiator. Nevertheless, although in a specific context they may occur as a surprise, there is enough general appreciation of these risks that major faits accomplis are generally regarded as dangerous, even desperate attempts. That raises the question as to why such all-or-nothing strategies are adopted. In particular cases, the answer may be that the risks are underestimated or not seen at all; the strategy seems cheap or relatively promising. But in other cases, including most of those examples mentioned above, though the risks were underestimated they were still seen as high. Why were they accepted? Why were moves attempted and tactics adopted that, failing, threw their opponents into crises that led, in turn, into intense crisis for the initiator?

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One finds in a significant number of the historical examples that the situation that preceded and led to the attempted fait accompli had many of the characteristics of a crisis within the initiator's government. In

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particular, one finds that a sense of deadline dominated internal policy discussion, a sense that time was running out, that action must be undertaken urgently if at all. The heads of state faced with what they regarded as a "last chance" to avert or reverse an unfavorable train of events. Whether or not circumstances were about to turn dramatically for the worse, the key consideration was that it was soon to become impossible to improve them or stop a downward trend, even by radical means. It was in this mood that radical means began to be contemplated. VN '61  
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Thus, Hitler in 1937, 1938, and in 1939, hammered away at his reluctant generals on the necessity for carrying out what they regarded as desperate gambles before his opponents completed their rearmament (and before he himself might be eliminated--a deadline probably more significant for him than for his listeners). The all-or-nothing sweep of the Japanese in the Pacific, including the surprise at Pearl Harbor, followed from a fairly precise calculation of the approaching moment at which their imperial ambitions would otherwise have to be abandoned, due to a strangulation of their oil supplies and war material.

In the case of the Bay of Pigs, the deadline for the U.S. decision-makers was reportedly provided by the impending arrival of MIGs and Czech-trained pilots and of other defensive weapons in Cuba, and at the same time by the imminent decay of the covertly trained rebel forces as an instrument through denial of their bases and loss of their "cover." According to published accounts (no evidence on this question has been available to me, and I cite these conjectures merely to illustrate the principle) it was estimated that the operation was almost sure to be successful if

undertaken in the next month or two (April or May, 1961), and almost surely infeasible after that. Whether or not these actually were the estimates in that situation, it is in this frame of mind that radical actions are contemplated.

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found* On the other hand, when the fait accompli is seen not as a desperate move but as a fairly unrisky one, the factor of timing may again be important; the risks may be seen as low because of particular circumstances related to the timing. There may be special, and fleeting, opportunities for covering the operation or distracting the opponent in its early phases. Or special factors may be thought to operate, at a particular time and for a limited period, to inhibit the opponent from reacting either early or late. Thus, a factor in the timing of the Israeli attack on the Sinai Peninsula in 1956 was said to be the Israeli calculation that a U.S. president would be too preoccupied to react decisively in the weeks prior to a presidential election, and moreover would be unwilling to move against the Israelis at the cost of Jewish votes. Likewise, as I shall discuss in detail, the deployment of missiles to Cuba in 1962 may have been timed so that the relatively vulnerable pre-operational phase would conclude just after the U.S. Congressional election, on the assumption that the administration would be unwilling to admit a challenge to action just prior to the elections.

In both sorts of cases, the calculations leading to a sense either of desperation or of hope, indication last chances or fleeting opportunities, were unknown to foreign heads of state at the time, and might well have appeared astounding and absurd, as well as ominous, if they had been

known. The actions that these calculations led to came as surprises to these opponents, because they were not only ignorant of the calculations, the mood of desperation or optimism, but did not know that they did not know. They felt confident that they knew their opponent's thoughts and designs. But because those opponents kept their calculations private and prepared their actions in secret, they in turn denied themselves the chance of discovering mistakes and unrealistic premises before it was too late. They denied <sup>themselves</sup> ~~a~~ having to <sup>be</sup> evidence that the "fleeting" opportunity would not soon disappear, or that it had already disappeared, or that the desperate action being prepared had no chance of succeeding, or every chance of provoking disastrous reprisal. Thus the crisis was prepared.

So far the secrecy and deception that characterize the attempted fait accompli have been related to their effect in deterring action by the opposing heads of state. But it may be regarded as of equal or even greater importance to conceal the preparations from two other audiences: (a) the opponent's public; (b) the initiator's own public, or certain parts of his government.

Let us take the latter first. The head of state contemplating a certain change in the international status quo may anticipate opposition from his own bureaucracy, or his public, or from allies or neutrals; opposition to the move itself, to its costs or the risks of counteraction, or to the methods involved. Secrecy of preparations, and deceptive statements and moves, could allow him to get ahead with preparations, at least, for the <sup>moment</sup> ~~move~~, without arousing this opposition. He might or might not propose to carry these preparations straight through to decisive action. He might, indeed, share the reservations of the critics of the move so long as the current circumstances obtained, but he might wish

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to be in position to carry it out quickly (and thus, given the prior secrecy, in the form of a fait accompli) if circumstances changed.

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On the other hand, if he can prevent his domestic or allied opposition from stifling the move in its earliest phases, he may hope to buy their approval with its eventual success. The only way to achieve this goal might be to conceal the operation from its potential critics and opponents. Even after success, the leader would then face charges of misleading those whom he had a responsibility to inform; but the impact of this charge would be reduced by success, (as it would be overshadowed by failure) and reduced still further if it could be claimed that the secrecy was intrinsic to the success, that is, that it was essential to mislead the international opponents. Thus, even though more open and direct tactics may be roughly as promising so far as the opponent is concerned, the fait accompli may recommend itself as an approach because of the need, in fact, to confront one's own public or bureaucracy or allies with the move as a fait accompli. The Bay of Pigs would seem an obvious example.

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The other circumstances that recommend the fait accompli are those in which it is the attitude of the opponent's public or allies or bureaucracy that is feared rather than the personal responses of the opposing leaders themselves. Those leaders, whether they recognize the projected move early or late, might be expected to be acquiescent (even if unhappy) if they were insulated from domestic pressures. The problem, then, is to keep the project secret not so much from them as from the hotheaded elements in their population or alliances.

It may be necessary to deceive the leaders themselves, but only as

incidental or instrumental to the end of deceiving these pressure groups. Since this presumes that the opposing leaders are believed to have significantly different attitudes or tendencies to action from dominant elements in their bureaucracy or populace, it might seem to be a very special situation. Yet this belief figures in a striking number of the attempted faits accomplis that we have mentioned. Perhaps the reason is that this perception (that the opposing head is much less disposed to counter a particular move than important parts of his population, and perhaps much less opposed to the move than his public position would suggest) is particularly encouraging to an attempted fait accompli. It appears to hedge against sloppiness in maintaining secrecy, for the opposing leader is expected, in effect, to cooperate in maintaining that secrecy against its true target, the opponent's public. Moreover, he is not expected to be quick on the trigger in responding to ambiguous indications, so that the risks due to leakage are reduced.

*Surz* To adopt the tactic of the fait accompli may even be seen as a favor to the opposing head of state. Whether he is thought to approve the move or to disapprove of it mildly or strongly, it is believed that he would prefer to be confronted with it suddenly in an "irreversible" form, rather than to be challenged to action by an overt process that would arouse his domestic activists. Conceivably Khrushchev persuaded himself that this was Kennedy's state of mind prior to the introduction of missiles into Cuba.

The combination of both the above motives occurs when one presents an ally with an act as a fait accompli, not because the allied head of state himself opposes it, but in order to relieve him in the eyes of



his own public or of common enemies from responsibility for the move or from opportunity and hence responsibility to oppose it. Thus, the British and French took for granted that Eisenhower would approve the end result of their Suez operation in 1956, the toppling of Nasser, whatever he thought of the means or risks. Their tactics had the flavor of the first calculation above; but their secrecy may also have been conceived (most misguidedly) as a favor to Eisenhower, relieving him of the onus of the guilty knowledge of an aggressive project.

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NOG* the tactics of the Bay of Pigs were undoubtedly dominated by the first type of consideration. But the secrecy surrounding some other clandestine operation, such as the U-2 overflights of Russia from 1956-1969, may be due to this second consideration; it may be a "favor" to the opposing head of state who, lacking ability to counter the operation effectively, would prefer that his failure not be known to his own public or that he not be challenged by his own public or allies to counter-action that would be ineffective or unwise.

To enlist the collaboration of an apparently implacable opponent in a pact of secrecy is a sophisticated, esoteric tactic. The fact that it can work and that it has worked is a fact best appreciated by heads of state, and concealed by them from others. The belief that it will work in a particular case is also perforce, a type of miscalculation to which heads of state are peculiarly prone. It is sometimes hard to keep things in the club.

#### THE BUDGET PLOY

Much of the abstract pattern we have described can be seen in an

episode of a different character from the other examples: the cancelling out of the Skybolt missile in 1962. Here is a case where the vulnerability of the move depended greatly upon its timing. Early in August of 1962 McNamara concluded, on the basis of studies completed then, that the half-billion dollars still to be spent on Skybolt could be saved without loss by cancelling the weapon, given the expected effectiveness of competing weapons systems and the rising costs and low reliability of Skybolt itself.

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Somewhat later, the essential decision was made by the President, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, that the half-billion dollar saving outweighed the pain that would be caused by the cancellation to the British. Since it was no part of their objective to embarrass the British nor to shatter the "special relationship," the President and the two Secretaries agreed on the need to find as satisfactory a compensation for the British as possible. (They were prepared, as were Macmillan and Thorneycroft, to contemplate Polaris in this role at this earlier stage, though large parts of the bureaucracy on each side of the Atlantic were not.)

If the decision had simply been announced at the moment these conclusions were reached, it would have been shortlived. Opposition from the Air Force, supported by the aircraft industry, would have had effective expression in Congress. The tactic adopted was to sit tight on the conclusions at the time and to expose them and the decision based upon them for the first time in the budget recommendations, some three months later. If a cancellation were presented in the form of a simple omission from an otherwise large defense budget, its vulner-

ability to reversal would be sharply altered. As a separate item earlier in abstraction from a budget, Congressional proponents of Skybolt could simply maintain that Skybolt was indispensable, leaving it to the Administration to bear the responsibility for any compensating cuts elsewhere that might be taken, or for the over-all size of the budget. But confronted with a coherent and large budget that lacked provision for Skybolt, those who would urge that funds be added to the budget to keep the project going would either have to take the responsibility for swelling the large budget still further or they could be challenged to recommend and to take responsibility for specific cuts elsewhere. Thus, what McNamara proposed was to produce a fait accompli against the Air Force and its backers in Congress.

Any leakage even suggesting the imminence of this decision could have been fatal to the project. All that was necessary to block the move prior to December was for its opponents to raise the question in sharp debate or in a press conference to force the Administration to define its current position on Skybolt publicly and unequivocally. A premature statement of intention to drop Skybolt would then have provoked a demonstration of public (though specialized) support for the system. The political costs of obduracy in the face of this opposition would have been intense; for one thing, the opponents of the move would be encouraged (by the likelihood of success) to make threats, commitments, and alliances that might, in the end, virtually compel them to retaliate if the move was carried out. Moreover, if the alarm was sounded before suitable compensation had been worked out for the British, the Adminis-

tration would be open to charges of heartlessness and betrayal, and the undesired political costs for Macmillan would be maximized.

Since the opposition tactics involved would be politically cheap, the slightest suspicion would be enough to provoke them; therefore, the level of suspicion had to be kept extraordinarily low. Secrecy was essential, and McNamara and the three or four assistants who were informed of his intentions proceeded to demonstrate extraordinary talent in keeping their mouths shut. For the first month or two the proposal reached no one outside their circle, either in Defense, State Department, the Budget Bureau or the White House. But secrecy was not enough. Some positive deception was unavoidable, both because some questions were being asked anyway on the basis of the rumors that always arose around budget time, and because some positive actions were required whose omission would instantly have given warning.

The time had arrived in the development process of Skybolt when funds for production tooling would have to be released if Skybolt were to proceed into the production phase without delay. In fact, it was just because Skybolt had reached this point that the Administration was feeling the urgency of a "last chance" to cancel it. Risky and painful as it would be to cancel it even at this late stage, it would become virtually irreversible once large production commitments had been made to the project.

Not only was the project about to become enormously more expensive and to acquire even more intense supporters, but the very fact of large investments to be justified would soon make cutting it off as distasteful to the administration itself as to its current proponents, since in

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politics, bygones are never bygone. Thus, as usual, the tactic of the fait accompli, somewhat desperate in itself, was adopted in a move of urgency as a last opportunity approached its deadline, beyond which even more desperate measures would be of no avail.

The Administration proceeded to release limited production funds for Skybolt, thus spending money for purposes of deception, giving a powerful signal of reassurance to supporters of the program. The funds were released on a month-by-month, tentative basis during the period of budget consideration, but this in itself gave no alarm, for such indications of soul-searching and reluctance had appeared every year at budget time, and frequently off-season as well.

*Deposited in State*  
When questions were put directly to the Administration by Thorneycroft, on the basis of more authoritative rumors, they were at first turned aside with deceptive or misleading answers. Here a phenomenon of the fait accompli which we have discussed little earlier was at work. There was no desire, in fact, to deceive the British cabinet or even to delay their appreciation of the Administration's intention. However, to inform them prematurely was to take too great a risk of warning U.S. domestic opposition, via the channel British Cabinet-RAF-USAF-Congress. In the earlier stage, then, there seemed no alternative to maintaining the deception against our ally as well. As we shall discuss, the process of secrecy and deception has costs and risks, and these apply as well when the information is withheld from a third party simply to block a communication channel to the primary opponent. Later, when Thorneycroft and Macmillan were let in on the plan (in ample time prior to the estimated

"leak date"--at which time the news would hit the two publics--for the two Cabinets to concert on a plan of compensation). The communication, for reasons of security, was informal, brief, inexplicit and strictly limited in its recipients. This, too, had its effects.

Meanwhile, the preconceptions of the "oppositon"--the backers of Skybolt--were favorable to the strategy, for they all pointed to the implausibility of the Administration's undertaking this move. Indications of Administration unhappiness with Skybolt were not disquieting, for two different administrations had exhibited this unhappiness almost continuously from the outset of the program. Even fairly pointed attacks upon the program had been launched, without results. The Administration was thought unlikely to take on a new battle with the Air Force just after its recent campaign against the B-70. (Actually, it was the experience with the B-70 that had given the Administration a sense of deadline about the Skybolt; McNamara and the President now regarded it as a tactical error to have let the B-70 program continue as long as it had.) This was an underestimate of McNamara's heart for facing political oppositon in Congress.

Moreover, the proponents of Skybolt were confident that the Administration would not pay the political costs of intensely displeasing (indeed, politically endangering) the British Cabinet, which had represented the promise of Skybolt as a major feature of its collaboration with the United States. (From one point of view, they overestimated the Administration's charity, or its prudence; from another, they

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*all on mobile diplomats*

underestimated the Administration's willingness to compensate the British; though, as it turned out, this program of compensation was carried out maladroitly.) Finally, the opposition was reassured in the short run by the absence of any warning indications. They were confident they would receive ample warning of any proposal to cut, either from the Administration itself--underestimating the Administration's ability to hold tight counsel and to stop leaks--or from the RAF--underestimating the Administration's willingness to postpone informing the British, or to deceive them for a limited period.

Domestically, the tactics were a complete success. Security was essentially maintained until the Secretary's budget recommendations were sent to the JCS. The Administration had managed quietly to occupy the high ground during the night, and the Air Force, recognizing the low promise of an uphill assault, accepted the change without a significant fight. The fait accompli with respect to the U.S. "opposition" was a success.

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The results on the British side were more complicated, and far less happy. Here there was no intent to delude the British Cabinet nor, if it could be avoided, to damage their interests. But willingness to spare Macmillan a fait accompli, while presenting one to Congress, was a misunderstanding of Macmillan's domestic position. Macmillan and Thorneycroft, while unhappy about the move, were themselves prepared to accept it and could readily conceive of adequate compensation. But it was essential to them that the move, if it must take place, be presented to them as a fait accompli. The impression would be disastrous that they had taken part in a discussion of the move, before it was settled and irreversible, in which they had not opposed the move bit-

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terly, or in which they had treated the continuation of Skybolt as at all negotiable. If they were to persuade the Cabinet to accept the move as a fact rather than as a challenge, they had on the one hand to be able to disclaim all responsibility (including prior information of the move), and simultaneously<sup>el</sup> to be bearing in the other hand a concrete, generous, compensatory offer from the Americans. Only that combination could deter the pressure from the Cabinet, the Services, the party, and the public to do-or-die for dear old Skybolt; a fight which Macmillan and Thorneycroft knew, better than these others, would be hopeless--and for which they had no heart in any case. But without the generous offer from the Americans, Macmillan and Thorneycroft would be forced to fight even if the prospects were hopeless, if only to punish their ally for the humiliation of the move. Macmillan did not tell the Cabinet; did not plan. McNamara expected detailed counterproposals.

What the U.S. Administration failed to appreciate was the urgency of Macmillan's and Thorneycroft's need to avoid appearing in the eyes of the British Cabinet and Services to be trading, without a fight, the status quo on Skybolt for any alternative. The secrecy of the actual interaction was critical here, for it limited communication between the two heads of state and the Secretaries of Defense so sharply as to conceal from the Americans the precise nature of the English concerns. For reasons of security (including security against the U.S. bureaucracy; for reasons I shall not go into here, the U.S. offer of Polaris to the British was likewise to be presented by Rusk to the State Department as a fait accompli) it was decided to avoid formal



communications and to conduct the private negotiation in person.

But McNamara's interview with Thorneycroft was postponed for a variety of reasons until so late that fatal leaks had occurred to the British public and bureaucracy by the time it took place. And at this point, having failed to arrive at an adequate understanding of the British problems earlier, the Americans failed to present what Thorneycroft regarded as a minimum essential, concrete compensation: Polaris without strings. The offer was susceptible to improvement, as the Nassau negotiations later proved. But to be forced to ask for these adjustments, in full view of the bureaucracy and Services;

the public, the Administration's willingness to postpone informing the British, rather than to be confronted with a satisfactory package on a take-it-or-leave-it basis was inexorably to challenge Macmillan and Thorneycroft to fight for the best deal they could get, not to exclude in defeatist fashion the reversal of the decision on Skybolt itself.

In short, <sup>what</sup> Thorneycroft had wanted to confront was a fait accompli; what he got was a crisis.

He proceeded, as is customary in these situations, to present his tormenting opponent/allies with a crisis of their own. The ensuing process, through Nassau to DeGaulle's press conference in January and beyond, abounded in insult, humiliation, and intimations of maladroitness all around.

On both sides of the Atlantic, the episode illustrated the relations between crises and attempted faits accomplis. A crisis is, for a head of state, an urgent problem-solving situation. But a problem (as distinct, say, from an unfavorable or disappointing prospect) exists only if there

is some possibility of finding a "solution," that is, a course of action that can improve matters or avert a decline. A "problem" in this technical sense is a challenge to a politician, a test upon which he will be judged. If he himself, privately, has little hope of success, or disagrees that a problem exists, then he would much prefer to skip this test.

A generous counteroffer from the Americans would have removed most of the sting from the drive to regain Skybolt, but there would have been still some implication that the change was for the worse (else why had not the British pressed for it earlier?). Therefore, if they were to be spared a crisis, Macmillan and Thorneycroft wished it evident to all that there was no possibility to influence the decision; only thus could they be excused from the responsibility to challenge it. Thus, Thorneycroft hoped that the cancellation of Skybolt could be presented as due to "technical infeasibility." To resist it then would be to oppose the laws of nature; the Minister of Defense is not required to be that romantic in defending England's honor. But the Americans concluded that it would simply be impossible to conceal the fact that mainly economic laws were at work, (i.e., that British sensibilities--weighed in with marginal military benefits--were not worth half a billion dollars in the eyes of the U.S. Administration ; the problem before the two Cabinets was precisely to lessen the humiliation for the British of the "revealed preference."

Unfortunately, the British public, Services, and Cabinet were pro-

tected from the information in the early stages of the move by the tactics of fait accompli used both by the Americans and by Macmillan and Thorneycroft. When it burst upon them, as a surprise, it came prematurely, the secrecy having flown before a basic agreement had been worked out in saleable form. Yet it was not made obvious to these audiences that the situation was hopeless, that Skybolt was out. The British press proceeded to define the situation in such a way that for Macmillan to emerge from Nassau with anything but Skybolt would be interpreted as failure. (Apparently Macmillan himself had not read this mood correctly; he left Nassau highly satisfied with the deal he had negotiated, having rejected a fairly generous offer by the United States to split the costs of continued development of Skybolt.) In short, one can fail at a fait accompli even when the opposing head of state is cooperative. And the failure is a crisis.

So far we have considered circumstances to which the tactics of fait accompli are adapted, the calculations on which an attempted fait accompli are based, and the tactics involved in the effort. We have seen that it is in the nature of a fait accompli, if it fails to achieve passive acceptance by the opponent, that is, to succeed, to produce a crisis. For if secrecy is maintained until the closing stages of the move, but the opponent on becoming alerted is not convinced that the change is beyond influencing, he is then in an urgent decision-making situation with a short deadline, that is, a crisis. The hurried, stressful, and disorderly process of crisis decisionmaking is in itself somewhat more likely than more leisurely decisionmaking to result in radical, more violent countermoves which are in turn surprising and crisis-producing

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for the original actor.

It is the aim of the fait accompli to make a threatening situation seem hopeless rather than urgent: to induce withdrawal, acceptance, rationalization, change of goal, paralysis, disintegration, vacillation; not crisis, with its frantic and possible overtones of hysteria, panic and aggression. Yet, as we have seen, the failure of the fait accompli is likely to take the form of crisis.

What we have not so far examined is why this failure occurs so often, so violently, and so surprisingly to the initiator, as it does. In particular, we must consider now the factors intrinsic to the tactics that contribute to the likelihood, the intensity, and the lack of anticipation of its failure.

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The form of failure we shall examine is one in which secrecy and deception are effective as long, or almost as long, as originally intended, but in which the opponent, instead of accepting the situation, strives to rise to the occasion and to counter or punish the move.